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Lessons Learned From Conducting Cognitive Interviews with Youth

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Recent Cognitive Testing with Youth

| STUDY 1 Survey of physical activity and diet | STUDY 2 Survey of tobacco use | STUDY 3 Tobacco use items included in youth health study |
|---|---|---|
| Self-administered paper-and-pencil | Self-administered paper-and-pencil | Self-administered paper-and-pencil |
| Ages 11-18 | Ages 12-17 | Ages 14-17 |
| Recruited parent/teen dyads | Recruited parent/teen dyads; all parents used tobacco | Recruited teens who use tobacco |

What was (or should have been) different for youth?

- Timing of the interview
- Motivation
- Conducting the interview

Timing of the interview

- Time of day
 - Earlier may be better
- Length of interview
 - Shorter is better
- Seasonal schedules (school year vs summer)
 - More availability in summer
 - Answers to lifestyle questions may vary with season

Motivation

- Youth motivation may differ from adults
 - Parent may have decided youth's participation
Does youth actually want to be at the interview?
 - Incentive may not be youth's to keep
 - Youth, accustomed to following directions from adults, may not feel comfortable giving negative feedback
 - For adults, a cognitive interview is often a change from typical day-to-day activities
For youth, a cognitive interview may mimic experience during the school day

Conducting the interview

- Establishing rapport
 - May require more effort
 - Needs to happen earlier in interview
- Information provided about the task
 - Manage shorter attention spans by being more explicit about what to expect and the different components of the task
 - Stress differences of cognitive interview from school day by emphasizing it is not a test
 - Counter adult-youth power imbalance by emphasizing that youth are “experts” and it’s really okay to say negative things about the survey
- Probing
 - Set an engaging tone to keep youth attention
 - Ensure probes are developmentally appropriate
 - Craft probes so that interview is less cognitively burdensome
 - Use fewer open-ended probes and more direct ones

Conducting the interview, continued

■ Probes

| Traditional Probes | Youth Probes |
|---|---|
| Tell me more about your answer. | What made you pick strongly agree? |
| Tell me in your own words what a serving is. | What do you picture when you think about a serving? |
| What reaction do you have to this question? | Did you like or dislike answering this question? Why? |
| What other kinds of processed meat, if any, were you thinking of when you answered this question? | What do you think of when you hear “processed meat”? |

Our Ah-ha Moment:

Youth have limited autonomy

- Life in general

- Youth have limited control over personal schedules, which are largely determined by the school day and parents' calendars
- As kids, they are expected to follow directions from an adult in most areas of their lives

- Cognitive interview setting

- We recruit teens by contacting parents first
- Parents decide whether teen will participate
- Often, parents must bring them to interview
- Youth may have no control over what happens to incentive

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this paper.

Terry Koenig

Cynthia Helba

Alicia Norberg

Gina Shkodriani

Stephanie Beauvais

Jasmine Folz

Katy Caperna

Earlayna Batch